

This Week in Congress

November 2, 2009

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress."

Health Care Reform

Release of Speaker Pelosi's Updated Health Care Bill - On Thursday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi released H.R. 3962, an updated version of the House Democrats' health care reform legislation. This nearly 2,000 page bill expands on different versions of H.R. 3200, the original 1,017 page health care bill reported in July by the House Ways and Means, Energy and Commerce, and Education and Labor committees.

H.R. 3962 includes several changes from the measure introduced this summer, but the framework of the bill is the same. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that H.R. 3962 would cost \$1.055 trillion. Key provisions of the bill include:

- Creation of a new government-run health care program and health insurance purchasing exchange.
- Federal officials would negotiate payment rates with doctors and hospitals that accept the government-run plan.
- This bill would create 111 new boards, bureaucracies, commissions and programs.
- New insurance industry regulations that would prohibit insurers from rejecting customers based on pre-existing conditions and prohibit annual or lifetime benefit caps.
- The bill would cut Medicare payments to doctors and other health care providers by more than \$400 billion.
- Employers with annual payrolls greater than \$500,000 would be required to either provide health insurance for their employees or contribute 8 percent of their payroll to a federal fund to help subsidize employees who purchase coverage through the exchange.
- Most Individuals would be required to purchase health insurance or pay a penalty fee.
- The bill would expand Medicaid to cover everyone whose income is below 150 percent of the poverty line (about \$33,000 per year for a family of four). People who earn between 150 percent and 400 percent of the federal poverty level would be eligible for subsidies on a sliding scale to purchase insurance through the exchange.
- The bill would help pay for itself by imposing a 5.4 percent tax on individuals and businesses earning more than \$500,000 per year.

While I strongly disagree with the legislation proposed by Speaker Pelosi, I remain committed to seeking common-sense reforms that reduce health care costs, preserve care quality, and enhance access. [Click here](#) to read my statement on the release of H.R. 3962. [Click here](#) to review the text of H.R. 3962.

Fighting for Health Care Issues Important to Kansans - On Monday, I spoke to the House of Representatives to express my concerns with the health care debate and to voice my support for common-sense ideas that would make quality health coverage more affordable and more accessible for American families. I ran for Congress with a purpose of wanting to preserve the way we live our lives in Kansas. Access to quality, affordable health care is one of those things that determine whether our towns survive and have a future. Reform legislation is being crafted by only a few Democratic lawmakers and White House staff behind closed doors. This process concerns me because, in this closed environment, the future of health care for Kansans is being decided. This small group needs to understand the problems that cutting Medicare reimbursement rates will pose for Kansas hospitals, doctors, nurses and other health care providers. Kansans want reforms that enhance our current system and reduce health care costs. We lower costs and maintain quality through reforms that eliminate the unnecessary over-spending in our current system, not by shifting the costs of health care to taxpayers and mortgaging our children's future with exploding budget deficits.

[Click here](#)

to watch my speech.

If Members of Congress Vote for a Public Plan, They Should Enroll in it - I also spoke to my colleagues in the House of Representatives this week about the need for Members of Congress who support a government-run health plan to enroll in the public plan. If Members of Congress are convinced that the public, government-run option will deliver quality, affordable care, then they should also be willing to enroll in the public option. Congress should not have a better health care plan than they are willing to provide the American people, especially since the American people are paying for both. H.R. 3962, Speaker Pelosi's updated health care bill, does not require Members of Congress to enroll in the new government-run plan. Instead the language says that Members "may" enroll in the public option.

[Click here](#)

to watch my speech.

Transparency Needed in Health Care Reform Negotiations - With so much at stake in the

debate over the future of health care, I am troubled by a process that allows for backroom deals to be cut by a few lawmakers. I sponsored legislation this week that calls for any conference committee meetings held to determine the final content of health care reform legislation to be conducted in public under the watchful eye of the American people. It is important that an open and transparent process be followed.

Battling the Estate Tax

I sponsored legislation this week that addresses problems with current estate tax laws. The legislation, H.R. 3905, will increase the portion of an estate that is exempt from the tax and reduce the maximum tax rate. If congressional action is not taken to fix the estate tax, it will be fully reinstated in 2011. I have long sought a permanent repeal of the estate tax. While this legislation will not completely eliminate the estate tax, it is the best alternative given today's political and economic climate. The estate tax comprises less than one percent of U.S. revenues, but poses a substantial impediment to the growth of family farms and small businesses. Kansas families need to have this issued resolved now so they can make long-term plans with more certainty. [Click here](#) to read more about this legislation.

Urging Network News to Correct H1N1 Coverage

This week, I contacted all major news broadcasting companies after observing network news anchors and reporters incorrectly referencing the H1N1 virus as "swine flu"; I asked

broadcasters to stop using the term "swine flu" and refer to this disease by its correct name, H1N1. While the Obama Administration, the World Health Organization, and the World Organization for Animal Health have all asked that the virus be referred to as H1N1 and not "swine flu," many media outlets continue to use the term "swine flu." The incorrect use of the term "swine flu" confuses consumers and leads them to believe that pork is unsafe to eat. During a recent House Agriculture Committee hearing, I learned that H1N1 has led to nearly \$1.317 billion in lost revenue for the U.S. pork industry over the last six months.

[Click here](#) to read my letter to broadcasting companies. [Click here](#) to read more about this topic.

ACORN Funding Should Not be Restored

I spoke to the House of Representatives this week to remind Members of Congress to be aware of the risk of allowing federal funding to be restored to the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN). Last month, funding for ACORN was stripped from a spending bill. American taxpayers should not have to subsidize ACORN's activities and its funding should not be reinstated. [Click here](#) to watch my speech.

Recognizing Hanover Public Schools

I spoke to the House of Representatives this week about Hanover Public Schools and its commitment to providing quality education. Located in northern Kansas, Hanover Public Schools serve approximately 175 students from the surrounding rural areas. For the past three consecutive years, Hanover High School has received the Government Achievement award, an award that is given to the top five percent of schools in Kansas that meet the highest standards in Kansas assessments. The high school was also cited by U.S. News and World Report as one of the top schools in the country and also has many accomplishments in sports. Small town values and strong community ties have produced generations of successful graduates from Hanover Public Schools. [Click here](#) to watch my speech.

Agriculture Subcommittee Hearings

I participated in two House Agriculture Committee subcommittee hearings this week. On Wednesday, the Subcommittee on Horticulture and Organic Agriculture held a hearing to review implementation of the Horticulture and Organic Agriculture Titles of the 2008 Farm Bill. The witness for the hearing was Rayne Pegg, the Administrator of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

On Thursday, the Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Energy, and Research held a hearing to review the future of next generation biofuels. USDA witnesses included Dallas Tonsager, Undersecretary of Rural Development at USDA, and Dr. Rajiv Shah, Undersecretary for Research, Education, and Economics at USDA. A second panel of witnesses included five

representatives from companies developing diverse types of the next generation biofuels, including biodiesel and jet fuels from algae and ethanol from cellulosic materials. The witnesses shared with the subcommittee different ways to improve USDA's biofuels programs. I brought to the attention of Undersecretary Tonsager how USDA's implementation of the Bioenergy Program for Advanced Biofuels unfairly discriminates against certain Kansas biofuel producers and asked that USDA correct the problem in forthcoming regulations.

Presenting Award to Hutchinson Community College

On Wednesday, I attended a ceremony where Hutchinson Community College (HCC) was given the first ACT Workforce Readiness Award. HCC received the award from ACT, an organization that provides research, information and program management solutions for education and workforce development. The ACT Workforce Readiness Award is given to an institution that has demonstrated a constant dedication to meeting the needs of its students and employees while meeting employer expectations about workforce skills. HCC's implementation of the workforce readiness program demonstrates its commitment to Kansas students and businesses.

Congratulations to Dr. Ed Berger, HCC President; Randy Myers, the Dean of Student Services at HCC; and to the faculty, staff and students. [Click here](#) to read more. [Click here](#) to watch a video.

Supporting National Adoption Day and National Adoption Month

On Wednesday, the House of Representatives passed H. Res. 831, legislation that I sponsored supporting the goals and ideals of National Adoption Day and National Adoption Month. November is National Adoption Month and November 21 is National Adoption Day. There are nearly 500,000 children in the foster care system in the United States. It is important that we promote awareness of adoption and the children in foster care awaiting families, celebrate the families involved in adoption and recognize current programs designed to promote adoption.

Commending Tea Party Participants

As I travel across Kansas, one common theme I hear from folks is their frustration about the amount of unnecessary spending in Washington, D.C. Rightfully so, thousands of Americans are standing up to tell Congress enough is enough. Our national debt is now creeping toward \$12 trillion and shows no sign of slowing down. I am a sponsor of H.Res. 870, which expresses gratitude and appreciation to the individuals and families who participated in the Taxpayer March on Washington, D.C., on September 12, 2009. I applaud the millions of Americans who chose to exercise their right of free speech and participated in the Tea Party protest. They sent a clear message to Washington that there needs to be less spending, less borrowing and less government. [Click here](#) to watch my speech.

Fighting Hunger in Salina

Across the country and in Kansas, food banks and pantries are seeing an increase in demand for emergency food assistance. On Sunday, I attended the Empty Bowls Soup Supper in Salina to benefit the Salina Emergency Aid Food Bank. Soup for the event was prepared by local restaurants and handmade bowls were given to guests at the fundraiser. As co-chair of the House Hunger Caucus, I was encouraged to see members of the community come together to help their neighbors who have fallen on tough times.

A tax deduction currently exists for businesses that donate unused food to food banks. Unfortunately, this deduction does not cover all businesses and is set to expire at the end of this year. I am a sponsor of legislation that will expand the deduction and make it permanent. H.R. 3227 temporarily allows taxpayers to deduct the full fair market value of the donation and permanently extends the deduction for contributions of food to all business taxpayers. According to USDA, up to 1 billion pounds of food goes to waste each year. I strongly encourage businesses to donate unused food rather than throw it away. Thanks to Kathy Jackson for her invitation.

Annual Listening Tour Continues in the Big First

I will be back in Kansas for Thanksgiving and will continue my annual Listening Tour. My next stops will be in Comanche and Barber Counties on November 23, 2009.

Monday, November 23

Comanche County Tour Stop, Wilmore

Time: 11:30 AM to 12:30 PM

Location: Wilmore Community Building

Address: Corner of Railroad and Taft

Barber County Tour Stop, Medicine Lodge

Time: 1:30 PM to 2:30 PM

Location: The People's Bank

Address: 117 S. Main

During each town hall, I am able to listen to folks' concerns and take that information back with me to Washington, D.C. Residents are invited to attend the town halls to share their thoughts with me on current issues. [Click here](#) to view the listening tour schedule and to see where I have already stopped this year.

Speaking to High School Students

On Friday morning, I spoke to a class of 26 seniors at Perry-Lecompton High School in Perry about my responsibilities as a Member of Congress and the importance of civic participation. Our country and communities are stronger when citizens are engaged in the political process. The students and I also discussed current topics, including health care reform. Thank you to teacher Mark Armstrong for allowing me to visit his class and to Dennis Hupe, a community leader, for his invitation.

Leadership Kansas

I attended a Leadership Kansas luncheon in Topeka on Friday, where Secretary of State Ron Thornburgh spoke to the 2009 class. Each year, Leadership Kansas chooses 40 individuals

from across the state to participate in a six month leadership program sponsored by the Kansas Chamber of Commerce. I enjoyed visiting with these leaders about issues important to them and their communities. Congratulations to the members of the class who later that evening graduated from the program.

Attending McCurry Brothers Black Angus Sale

On Saturday, I attended the McCurry Brothers 81st Anniversary Black Angus Sale, Tradition with a Vision II, near Mt. Hope. The McCurry family's history of farming and raising Angus cattle began in 1928 when Walter McCurry purchased two Angus heifers from his brother-in-law. This year's sale sold approximately 85 head of registered Angus cattle. Attending the anniversary sale gave me a chance to visit with cattlemen from across Kansas about issues important to livestock producers.

It was encouraging to see that family values and hard work have allowed the McCurry family to maintain their way of life through generations. Thanks to Jesse McCurry for inviting me to attend.

Attending a Reception at Gorham State Bank in Honor of Wayne Nelson

On Friday, I attended a reception honoring Wayne Nelson on the occasion of his retirement from Gorham State Bank. Wayne worked for 27 years at Gorham State Bank and nearly 50 years in the industry. It was a good have the opportunity to visit with so many of Wayne's long time customers. I congratulate him for his years of dedication to the Gorham community and wish him the best in his retirement.

In the Office

Jim French of Partridge was in with OxFam to share his support for the Global Food Security Act of 2009. Jane Kelly of Topeka was in with the Kansas Home Care Association to voice her support for the inclusion of home health services in health care reform. President Ed Berger and Randy Myers of Hutchinson were in with Hutchinson Community College to discuss education and workforce training initiatives.

Meg Wilson, principal of Rawlins County High School in Atwood, was in to talk about the Partnership in Character Education Program and fostering shared leadership among Kansas high school students. She presented me with a copy of *Our Boys: A Perfect Season on the Plains with the Smith Center Redmen*. Dr. Saeid Sajadi of Overland Park was in to tell me about the humanitarian situation at Camp Ashraf in Iraq. Arvil Bass of Salina was in to visit.

Several Kansans visited my Washington, D.C., office this week to receive a tour of the United States Capitol, including Dallas and Linda Fowler of Hutchinson, Jane Wideman of Burlington, Jacob and Jacqueline Wood of Salina and Jill Hulse of Lindsborg.

Very truly yours,

Jerry